



Letter to the Editor

## Announcing the New Definition of Health Technology Assessment

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### To the Editor:

Our objective in writing this letter is to announce, on behalf of an international joint task group, the release of the new definition of health technology assessment (HTA).<sup>1</sup>

Since the birth of HTA in the mid-1970s, when the US Office of Technology Assessment began producing the first HTA reports,<sup>2</sup> the global HTA community has cultivated a shared understanding of HTA. This is the result of considerable effort over the past 4 decades to improve and harmonize the science, methods, and practice of HTA.<sup>3–6</sup> The definition of HTA itself has evolved over the years as well, with varied versions of the definition being used in different organizational contexts.<sup>7,8</sup> Although the central concepts are consistent across these definitions, the phrasing tends to be cumbersome and technical, which can impede the immediate understanding by those who are new to the field or for whom English is not their first language. In different organizations working in the field of HTA, we encountered a clear need to develop a new, internationally accepted definition that incorporated the central concepts of HTA in language that would be both easily understood by anyone and much more memorable and aspirational than existing definitions.

Recognizing that developing a new definition of HTA would be a challenge, in early 2018, the International Network of Agencies for HTA (INAHTA) and Health Technology Assessment

International (HTAi) conducted a feasibility assessment in consultation with representatives from other leading HTA networks. Through this process it was agreed that it was indeed feasible to update the definition. It was further noted that the wide-ranging international collaboration required to give this work legitimacy and credibility would itself bring benefits by strengthening relationships across the HTA community.

So, between May 2018 and September 2019, we convened an international joint task group comprising representatives of INAHTA; HTAi; the International Society for Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research (ISPOR); the regional HTA networks in Europe (EUnetHTA), Asia (HTAsiaLink), and the Americas (RedETSA); and the HTA Glossary Committee to develop the new definition. The World Health Organization acted as an observer to the group.

First, the international joint task group agreed on a set of guiding principles for developing the new definition. Second, an extensive, iterative consultation plan was followed where draft versions of the definition were reviewed by the Boards of Directors of the organizations represented in the international joint task group, and then there was a subsequent open consultation on a revised draft with the broader HTA community. The comments and feedback received at each stage were integrated by the international joint task group. In total, 3 versions of the definition were tested and reviewed before arriving at the final version

**Table 1.** The new definition of health technology assessment.

The definition of health technology assessment (HTA) is provided below, with important clarifying information provided in 4 accompanying notes:

**HTA is a multidisciplinary process that uses explicit methods to determine the value of a health technology at different points in its lifecycle. The purpose is to inform decision making in order to promote an equitable, efficient, and high-quality health system.**

Note 1: A health technology is an intervention developed to prevent, diagnose, or treat medical conditions; promote health; provide rehabilitation; or organize healthcare delivery. The intervention can be a test, device, medicine, vaccine, procedure, program, or system. (Definition from the HTA Glossary: <http://htaglossary.net/health+technology>).

Note 2: The process is formal, systematic, and transparent, and it uses state-of-the-art methods to consider the best available evidence.

Note 3: The dimensions of value for a health technology may be assessed by examining the intended and unintended consequences of using a health technology compared with existing alternatives. These dimensions often include clinical effectiveness; safety, costs, and economic implications; ethical, social, cultural and legal issues; and organizational and environmental aspects, as well as wider implications for the patient, relatives, caregivers, and the population. The overall value may vary depending on the perspective taken, the stakeholders involved, and the decision context.

Note 4: HTA can be applied at different points in the lifecycle of a health technology (ie, pre-market, during market approval, post-market, and through to the disinvestment of a health technology).

agreed upon by the Boards of Directors of the international joint task group member organizations. The Board of EuroScan also officially endorsed the final definition.

The new definition is presented in Table 1, and it can be referenced in the HTA Glossary<sup>9</sup> and in a recent publication we prepared for the International Journal of Technology Assessment in Health Care.<sup>1</sup> That article also describes in greater detail the process followed by the international joint task group to develop the new definition.

We are very proud of the consensus achieved by the international HTA community to agree on the new definition of HTA. We share this satisfaction with the members of the international joint task group who were instrumental in developing the definition and achieving this global consensus. It is our sincere wish that the new, internationally accepted definition of HTA will be welcomed by the broader HTA community as a foundational and aspirational concept for many years to come.

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